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AUTHOR Pardeck, John T.; Pardeck, Jean A.
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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy has been used by the helping professions as a treatment technique for many years, and several studies suggest that it can be an effective treatment tool. In helping children who are experiencing difficulties, bibliotherapy treatment involves the child reading about others who have solved similar problems. An increasing number of American families are in a state of transition, and these changing family structures have presented unique problems for some children involved in the transition. Children in changing families may experience a sense of hostility, guilt, and anger; a diminished sense of belonging; a loss of security; and a loss of family income. Helping professionals working with these children should be sensitive to three major family trends affecting many children: divorce, single-parent families, and blended families. Currently, there are many excellent children's book available that deal with one or more of these changing family situations. By identifying those children who would benefit most from bibliotherapy, school social workers can help certain children attempting to cope with the family in transition. (A table is included which lists children's book titles that a practitioner may use for bibliotherapy with children involved with a family change.) (NRB)

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HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH THE CHANGING FAMILY THROUGH BIBLIOTHERAPY

John T. Pardeck, Ph.D., ACSW
Assistant Professor of Social Work
Arkansas State University
P.O. Box 998
State University, AR 72467

Work: (501) 972-3705
Home: (501) 932-1785

and

Jean A. Pardeck, M.Ed.
Reading Specialist

Abstract

The bibliotherapy technique is discussed with an emphasis on how the school social worker can use the technique to help children cope with the changing family. Useful books for helping children cope with the family in transition are listed, as well as guidelines for application.

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HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH THE CHANGING
FAMILY THROUGH BIBLIOTHERAPY

Bibliotherapy has been used by the helping professions as a treatment technique since the turn of the century. In the 1930s, Doctors Karl and William Menninger advocated the use of bibliotherapy by not only professionals, but also by lay people.[1] Many articles on the subject of bibliotherapy appeared in the professional literature in the 1940s; these articles examined the psychological validity of this emerging approach to treatment.[2] During the 1950s, some of the seminal thinking on the subject of bibliotherapy was done by Caroline Shrodes and others who examined the state of the art, thus influencing the field greatly from a philosophical point of view.[3] Margaret Hannigan and William Henderson did extensive on-site research focusing on the impact of bibliotherapy on young drug abusers close to parole. Their case studies, conducted during the 1960s, indicated the success of bibliotherapy.[4] Since the 1960s, numerous studies have been conducted on bibliotherapy suggesting that it can be an effective treatment tool.[5]

The term bibliotherapy, most simply defined, means helping with books. A more detailed definition from the Dictionary of Education states that bibliotherapy is the "use of books to influence total development, a process of interaction between the reader and literature which is used for personality assessment, adjustment, growth, clinical and mental hygiene purposes; a concept that ideas inherent in selected reading material can have a therapeutic effect

1

upon the mental or physical ills of the reader."[6] In essence, this detailed definition suggests that bibliotherapy can be used as a treatment technique for not only clinical problems, but also for meeting growth and adjustment needs of clients. Lindeman and Kling also suggest a similar distinction for the uses of bibliotherapy; they see it as an approach that can help 1) the emotionally troubled, 2) those with minor adjustment problems, and 3) children who need help meeting developmental needs.[7]

In terms of helping children who are experiencing difficulties, bibliotherapy treatment can occur by the child reading about others who have solved similar problems. Thus, with this information and the guidance of a skilled helper, the child can gain new insight into alternative solutions. Through books, children can also see how others have encountered anxieties and frustrations, hopes and disappointments, failures and successes, and apply this insight toward meeting real life situations. Some therapists also suggest that literature can be used as a tool in preventing some difficult situations from becoming full-blown problems.[8] In other words, bibliotherapy can be used as an effective tool for helping children deal with various problems related to childhood. In this paper, the focus will be on helping children cope with the changing family patterns in American society.

Effectiveness and Usefulness

A major question of those not familiar with the bibliotherapeutic technique concerns the effectiveness and usefulness of this approach. The authors in their recent book, Young People with Problems: A Guide to Bibliotherapy, present 24 studies that have

found bibliotherapy to be effective as a treatment tool.[9] Two of the core journals for school counselors in the United States, Elementary School Guidance and Counseling and The School Counselor, continuously publish papers on the usefulness of bibliotherapy. In contrast, little has appeared in the social work literature on this technique. In Table 1, for the years 1980 to 1983[10], a content analysis of articles dealing with bibliotherapy in two major social work journals and two counseling journals is presented. The results in Table 1 illustrate that as a treatment technique, bibliotherapy is well grounded among school counselors, but not social workers.

The Changing Family

Demographic studies conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1983) clearly show that an increasing number of families are in a state of transition.[11] Table 2 demonstrates that the number of children living with biological parents has decreased from 79 percent in 1960 to 65 percent in 1982. Although not a dramatic increase since 1960, 10 percent of children now live in blended families. As shown in Table 2, a major shift in family structure has been the number of children living in one parent families--as of 1982, 22 percent.

A major factor contributing to this change in the American family has been divorce. Bumpass projects that if present trends continue, 41 percent of children born into marriage in the United States will experience family disruption. When children of unmarried mothers are included, a child born today has a 49 percent chance of living in a single-parent family for some period of time,

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF ARTICLES FROM 1980-1983 INCLUDING BIBLIOTHERAPY IN MAJOR COUNSELING AND SOCIAL WORK JOURNALS

Journal	Articles Including Bibliotherapy
Elementary School Guidance and Counseling[1]	15
The School Counselor[2]	26
Social Casework[3]	5
Social Work[4]	2

[1]Published 4 times a year, each issue includes approximately 10 articles.
[2]Published 5 times a year, each issue includes approximately 10 articles.
[3]Published 10 times a year, each issue includes approximately 8 articles.
[4]Published 6 times a year, each issue includes approximately 10 articles.

TABLE 2

TRENDS IN FAMILY STRUCTURES FOR CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OLD

	Percentages		
Family Structures	1960	1970	1982
Biological Parents	79	73.7	65
Blended Family	9	9.4	10
One Parent	9	13.4	22
Other	3	3.5	3

Compiled from P.C. Glick, "Children of Divorced Parents in Demographic Perspective," Journal of Social Issues, 35, pp. 170-182 and United States Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

and the experience is not likely to be brief.[12]

These changing family structures have presented unique problems for some children involved in this transition. Several problem areas for children identified with this disruption in family patternings are as follows: 1) some of these children appear to foster feelings of guilt, anger, and hostility because of the changes in family patternings; 2) a diminished sense of belonging, resulting from confusion, a torn sense of allegiance, and a feeling of being pushed and pulled by parental problems is also related to this change; 3) some children are currently confronted with a loss of security, inducing real and imaginary fears related back to family breakdown; and 4) many families, due to family disruption, experience a loss of income, which may adversely affect children's physical needs--this is particularly often true in single-parent families because of the high level of poverty associated with this family system.[13]

Thus the transition of the family has created problems for some children that helping professionals should be sensitive to. In particular, professionals working with children must have insight into three major family trends impacting many children--the increasing number of divorces, the growing numbers of single-parent families, and the significant percentage of children living in blended family systems.

Divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly[14] and others[15] have identified several major issues that often confront children who are working through problems related to the divorce of parents. It should be noted that these problems are not always associated with children

of divorce and when present may be in varying degrees of intensity in terms of the child's reaction to the family break up.

* Some children have difficulty acknowledging the divorce.
* Many children feel a great loss because of the absent parent.
* Often children will be angry at the parents for breaking up and some children may even blame themselves for the break-up.
* Some children have problems realizing that the divorce is permanent and that their family will not reunite.

Single-parent families. Much has been written about the single-parent family in terms of the poverty issue, probably the number one problem of this family system. However, there are other issues that children of single parents must deal with that are not necessarily present in the two parent family system.[16]

* Children of single parent systems often feel the negative effects of the financial stress associated with this familial system.
* Children of single parent systems may have to assume increased responsibility at home because of the parent's employment.
* The single parent often attempts to assume the roles of both parents; this may affect the child's emotional and intellectual development.
* When the single parent dates, the child may have negative reactions to this dating.
* When the child visits the non-custody parent, problems may arise related to this visitation.

Blended family. Even though the increase in the number of blended families has not significantly increased over the past several decades, approximately 1 in 10 children under 18 years of age live in this kind of family system.[17] Visher and Visher, in their recent book, have identified the following core points that appear to

be the unique sources of tension and stress in the blended family.[18]

* The lack of clear roles and rules is often a problem in the blended family.
* There may be an unrealistic expectation that the step-parent should instantly love the child and vice versa.
* The loyalty of the child toward the biological parent not present may create stress in the blended family.
* There may be conflict and rivalry among stepsiblings in the blended family.

Increasing numbers of children are currently members of a family in transition, with many of these children confronted by one or more of the unique problems presented above. One tool available to school social workers who are helping children from families in transition cope with these issues is bibliotherapy.

Application of Bibliotherapy

The value of literature as a means of coping with various situations has long been recognized.[19] By providing books for a child dealing with certain problems he/she is facing, the school social worker can help the child: 1) gain greater insight into his/her problem(s), 2) focus attention outside of the self[20], 3) realize that he/she is not alone in having this problem, and 4) share his/her problem(s) with others.[21] Whether the school social worker uses bibliotherapy with an individual child or a group of children, books can aid in exploring problems and discussing solutions.

The changing family structure as evidenced by the increase in divorce rates, single-parent homes, and blended families has created unique problems which children must cope with. Currently, there are many excellent children's books available that deal with one or more of these changing family situations. Table 3 lists

TABLE 3

BOOKS DEALING WITH COMMON PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FAMILIES IN TRANSITION

BOOK TITLES	DIVORCE				SINGLE PARENT					BLENDED FAMILY			
	Difficulty Acknowledging Divorce	Feeling of Loss	Anger and Blame	Permanence of Divorce	Financial Stress	Increased Responsibilities	Role Problems of Single Parents	Parent Dating	Visits with Non-Custody Parent	Lack of Rules and Roles	Instant Love	Conflicting Loyalties	Stepsibling Conflict and Rivalry
Al(exandra) the Great			X		X	X	X		X			X	
Bugs in Your Ears		X								X	X		X
Chloris and the Wierdos		X	X	X			X	X					
The Divorce Express		X	X			X		X	X			X	
Don't Make Me Smile	X		X	X					X				
Hey, That's My Soul You're Stomping On	X	X	X			X	X						
How I Put My Mother Through College					X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Me and Mr. Stenner	X		X	X						X	X	X	
My Mother is not Married to my Father	X	X	X					X	X				X
Out of Love	X			X			X		X		X	X	X
A Smart Kid Like You	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X
Something to Count On	X	X	X		X		X		X				

book titles that a practitioner may wish to use in doing bibliotherapy with children involved with a family change. The books are additionally categorized according to problems characters within the plot must cope with--pressures and concerns many children faced with a family change can identify with.

Although selecting a book for a child that reflects his/her problem(s) is an integral part of bibliotherapy, other factors must also be considered. To best make use of bibliotherapy in helping children cope with the changing family, the social worker should observe the following guidelines:

1) bibliotherapy should be used as an adjunct to other forms of counseling.[22]

2) an adequate working relationship based on rapport, trust, confidence, and mutual understanding must exist between the social worker and child before bibliotherapy is introduced.[23]

3) the child's chronological age and reading level should be considered in selecting books. Talking books, braille, or LARGE TYPE books may be needed for handicapped children.

4) bibliotherapy is most effective for children with reading abilities that are average or above average.

5) the social worker should be familiar with plot, characters, etc. of any book being suggested to the child. It's best to have several appropriate books for a child to choose from.

6) the reading of the book should be followed by activities such as guided discussion, role playing, creative writing, or art projects. Follow-up activities used depend on age of child, his likes and dislikes, etc.[24]

Bibliotherapy can not be used with all children, in all settings, or for all purposes.[25] School social workers need to use good judgement in the application of bibliotherapy. Few professionals can deny, however, that reading problem-centered literature has considerable value in helping some individuals deal with

growth and adjustment needs.[26] The use of bibliotherapy for certain children attempting to cope with the new and different problems related to the changing family seems to afford just such an opportunity.

Summary and Conclusion

Bibliotherapy has been found to be a useful tool for treating problems facing children. Even though bibliotherapy has been used for several decades by allied helping professional groups, social workers appear to be relatively unfamiliar with this unique approach to treatment.

According to Cionciolo, "Books can provide a source of psychological relief from the various pressures and concerns that stem from the things that happen to children."[27] In addition to other problems and developmental needs, many children are now trying to cope with the changing family system. As one way of guiding these children in exploring and finding solutions for their problems, the school social worker can make use of the many excellent children's books which reflect changing family patterns. By identifying those children who would benefit most from bibliotherapy, school social workers can help certain children attempting to cope with the family in transition.

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2. Bernstein, p. 22.

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5. Pardeck and Pardeck, pp. 4-6.

6. Carter Good, Dictionary of Education (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1966), p. 212.

7. Barbara Lindeman and Martin Kling, "Bibliotherapy: Definitions, Uses, and Studies," Journal of School Psychology, Volume 2. 1969, pp. 36-41.

8. Pardeck and Pardeck, p. 8.

9. Pardeck and Pardeck, pp. 4-6.

10. These 4 years were chosen because they give insight into the most recent literature on bibliotherapy in both social work and school counseling.

11. See the publication from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Marital Status and Living Arrangements (Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 380, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office) for a detailed demographic presentation of these family trends.

12. L.L. Bumpass, "Children and Marital Disruption: A Replication and Update," Demography, No. 21, 1984, pp. 71-82.

13. Michael L. Bundy and James Gumaer, "Guest Editorial: Families in Transition," Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, Volume 19, No. 1, 1984, pp. 4-8.

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15. See for example J. Anthony, "Children at Risk from Divorce: A Review," in J. Anthony and C. Koupernick (eds.), The Child in His Family: Children at Psychiatric Risk (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1974).

16. Leroy G. Baruth and Margaret Z. Burggraf, "The Counselor and Single-Parent Families," Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, Volume 19, No. 1, 1984, pp. 30-37.

17. E. Visher and J. Visher, Stepfamilies: A Guide to Working with Stepparents and Stepchildren (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979).

18. Visher and Visher.

19. Baruth and Burggraf, p. 36.

20. Pardeck and Pardeck, p. 3.

21. Bernst[illegible] pp. 28-32.

22. Pard[illegible] Pardeck, p. 14.

23. Joseph [illegible] Laccaria and Harold A. Moses, Facilitating Human Development Through Reading: The Use of Bibliotherapy in Teaching and Counseling (Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing, 1968), pp. 77-78.

24. Pardeck and Pardeck, pp. 8-12.

25. Baruth and Burggraf, p. 36.

26. Theodore W. Hipple, Jane H. Yarbrough, and Jeffrey S. Kaplan, "Twenty Adolescent Novels (and More) that Counselors Should Know About," The School Counselor, Volume 32, No. 2, 1984, p. 142.

27. P. Cionciolo, "Children's Literature Can Affect Coping Behavior," Personnel and Guidance Journal, Volume 43, 1965, pp. 897-903.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS
(listed in Table 3)

Bates, Betty. Bugs in Your Ears. New York: Holiday House, 1977.

Corcoran, Barbara. Hey, That's My Soul You're Stomping On. New York: Atheneum, 1978.

Danziger, Paula. The Divorce Express. New York: Delacorte Press, 1982.

Gerson, Corinne. How I Put My Mother Through College. New York: Atheneum, 1981.

Greene, Constance. Al(exandra) the Great. New York: Viking Press, 1982.

Hunter, Evan. Me and Mr. Stenner. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1976.

Moore, Emily. Something to Count On. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980.

Okimoto, Jean. My Mother is not Married to my Father. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979.

Park, Barbara. Don't Make Me Smile. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.

Pevsner, Stella. A Smart Kid Like You. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

Platt, Kin. Chloris and the Wierdos. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury Press, 1978.

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